



Representative Mohamud Noor, Chair
Human Services Finance Committee
Minnesota House of Representatives
February 9, 2023

Dear Chair and Committee Members

On behalf of Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center, I am sending this letter to support Representative Bierman's House File 564 – increase funding to the school-linked mental health program.

Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center was established in 1964 by a dedicated group of concerned citizens and government officials of Houston, Wabasha, and Winona counties. In 1965, we opened our first clinic in Winona. Today, we provide services in Winona, Houston, Wabasha, Goodhue and Fillmore counties.

Hiawatha Valley Mental Health Center has 15 providers who are embedded in school districts in Southeastern MN. We provide direct therapy services to children and also function as part of the school team through:-

- following up with school staff,
- teaching staff skills for identifying a student's symptoms and de-escalation techniques
- coordinating services with school leadership
- follow up/ transition of services for students to access more intensive services in our clinic

The school-linked mental health grant allows us to work with school staff, coordinate care, and deliver services to students without insurance or with very high out of pocket expenses. This grant allows us serve children and families beyond the walls of our clinic sites. This flexibility helps our client's greatly. By its nature,

School-Linked Mental Health was designed to remove barriers students had to accessing mental health support. The service specifically focuses on serving children and families who are otherwise not able to access mental health. Not surprisingly, with the onset of the pandemic, barriers only became more significant for children and families who were School-Linked Mental Health clients.

Our providers in the school based program provide more than a traditional therapist does. In an effort to compensate their work appropriately now and in the future, we are very reliant on state grant funding which enables us to not only help a child, but improve the health of an entire school district.

We increasingly see the mental health needs of children and families are spiking as they are dealing with the trauma of the pandemic and the countless unanswered questions about how to maintain economic stability, personal safety and a sense of future. As needs are spiking in community life, capacity to meet those needs is increasingly imperiled. Prior to and exacerbated by COVID, the greatest challenges for providers is recruitment and retention of mental health counselors. Providers are seeking all lifelines for a more durable solution that will allow them to prepare to deliver critical mental health support. The School-linked mental health program is a key component of our community mental health care system. Please support increasing funding to the program and House File 564.

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Thank you for your consideration and support of the mental health needs of our children and families.

Sincerely

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